Translation Zone

Poems by Brian Cochran
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Acknowledgments
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Gratitude
For

Mary Jane Cochran
(June 22, 1925 – November 16, 2018)

George H. Cochran
(September 23, 1913 – October 1, 2008)
Translation Zone

At what we call the confluence, the way people talk about their relationship, as if there is no other, waters collide to form a kind of wall. The relatively swift Missouri collides with the slow, deep Mississippi, and you can see a vague line where it’s happening, a dreamed transitional space, a location for analysts or poets to inhabit, though some prefer paragraphs or other measures.

The river’s mouth is where my friend goes for language. The Missouri is an exceptionally roiled and muddy river; it’s hard not to imagine the words being dirty there. My friend, one of the steadiest people I have ever known, is unperturbed. Bring me your dirt and radiation, your unborn flowers, enormous snags, bring it all, he seems to say.

The poem too is a kind of transitional space, the poem is de-aspirational in its marketing stance, and as a space, does not prefer things in bins, or shrink-wrapped in plastic, or internet delivered. It has its preferences, but they are not in packaging or means of distribution, not really, though you might hardly know that for all the talk of formatting.

Urban life is often reduced to the notion of the “container,” like the containers used for storing and shipping merchandize. The city: a container of containers, writes Sergio González Rodríguez, speaking of Ciudad Juárez. Walls are safety zones, areas of exclusion, although I just misread that as wars are safety zones, areas of exclusion.

Writer-translator Yoko Tawada believes that words are not containers of meaning so much as they are gates that open onto the chasm into which all languages fall. A gate involves a border, a translation zone, a threshold. The Middle English ook, for oak, is also, in druidic usage, the root word for door. This is, I think, what Tawada is saying.
The wall formed by the collision of rivers, where the water of one meets the other and doesn't flow right or left, not really, just into, on, through, is one I have seen a deer practically walk across. The deer was in the water on the far side of the Missouri, being swept downstream. I was almost afraid to watch. When she hit the water wall, she calmly turned and used it, swimming almost without effort along the translation zone.